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ABSTRACT

The Cuiva Indians of Colombia are now threatened with cultural and physical extermination at the hands of Colombian cattle herders. The Cuiva build no permanent houses and have no permanent settlements. They do not practice agriculture, obtaining their food from hunting and gathering. For more than 4 centuries after their discovery, little has been known about this indigenous population. Until recently the Cuiva have resisted Eurpoean influence within their territory. Although most settlers in Cuiva territory are recent immigrants, cattle herders first entered the area at the end of the 19th century, and began exterminating the Indians. Settlement has also continually taken away Cuiva hunting areas, greatly depleting food supplies. According to the laws regulating land ownership, it is sufficient for a settler to build a fence around the part of the savannah required for his cattle and to exploit this land for a few years, to acquire legal title to it. The Cuiva see as their most pressing problem at this time the protection of their right to their own land. The solution is to provide the Cuiva with the means to purchase their own land. Professional legal advice from Colombia could be arranged on how the purchase of this land can best be arranged (perhaps by setting up a board of trustees). Also, the Colombian government must be convinced of the urgent need to protect Cuiva territory from new settlers. (FF)

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THE URGENT SITUATION OF THE CUIVA INDIANS OF COLOMBIA

Copenhagen 1972

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Copenhagen, July 1972
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Between July 1968 and July 197o I spent 21 months living with three distinct groups of nomadic hunters and gatherers in the eastern plains of Colombia. These three groups, which totalled about 54o individuals, occupy adjacent territories and speak a common language closely related to that of the Guahibo. Although the name is totally meaningless to them, I shall refer to these people as "the Cuiva", this choice is dictated by the fact that this is the name most commonly found in the literature on the area and the name used today by most Colombians.

What I wish to document here is how, after four centuries of struggle against the European invasion of their territory, the Cuiva are now threatened not only with cultural extinction, but also with physical extermination at the hands of Colombian cattle herders.

The vast plains lying east of the Andes are commonly divided into two distinct geographical regions: a) the Amazon forest to the south ("Amazonia"), and b) the plains of the Orinoco to the north of the Guaviare River ("Llanos Orientales" or "Orinoquia"). The northern plains are part of the natural drainage of the Orinoco and are crossed by some of its major tributaries, such as the Arauaca, Meta, and Vichada Rivers. In modern political terms, the plains of the Orinoco include large sections of the Colombian "Departamentos" of Meta and Boyaca, the "Intendencia" of Arauaca and the "Comisaria" of Vichada, as well as the Venezuelan "Estados" of Apure, Barinas, Cojedes, and Portuguesa.

The Cuiva live in an area situated approximately at the centre of

the Orinoco plains, on both sides of the frontier between Colombia and Venezuela. However, the three groups of Cuiva with whom I lived stayed mostly within Colombian territory, and I had only sporadic contacts with the Cuiva living in Venezuela. There are about 4oo Cuiva living more or less permanently in Venezuela, and as far as I can judge, although they are under different political authorities, their present situation and chances of survival are quite similar to the three cases described belowe (Coppens and Cato-David 1971). Within Colombia, Cuiva territory is today bounded by parallels 5^{o} and $6^{o}3o'$ North and meridians 71^{o} and $69^{o}3o'$ West. More precisely, the Cuiva today live along the middle section of the Meta River and along the lower parts of the Casanare, Ariporo, and Agua Clara rivers, close to where these four rivers meet.

Perhaps as much as 95% of Cuiva territory is occupied by immense grassy savannas dotted with palms and scattered shrubs. The monotony of the savannas is broken only by the many rivers and small streams, and the "gallery" forests which fringe their banks.

The three bands of Cuiva with whom I lived had respectively 211, 179, and 149 members. All the members of each one of these bands consider themselves as <u>kè monè</u> ("one people"), or <u>wa monè</u> ("our people") in opposition to <u>itchi monè</u> ("other people"). The idea of belonging to the same band is based on a rather vague notion of common origin, the communal emergence of the band at a precise geographical location, and is not supported by any system of descent-lines. This creates a highly flexible social organisation which allows bands to dissolve or to integrate in-coming strangers with relative ease; and this flexibility has probably been an essential element in the survival of the Cuiva throughout four centuries of violent contacts with the outside world, with many bands dispersed by warfare, disease, etc.

Each one of the three bands is known and named by the other two in relation to the most important river within its territory: a) "people of the Ariporo river", b) "people of the Meta river", and c) "people of the Agua Clara river". In this way each band has a well defined territory and is said to "belong" to a specific river. However, there are no precise definitions of the boundaires of each territory, nor is there any notion of established rights of land ownership. The Cuiva make it very clear that "anyone is free to travel and get food wherever he pleases", but also recognize - as I did - that the members of each band usually remain within their own territory.

The Cuiva never settle for very long in any one part of their territory. They build no permanent houses and have no permanent settlements. As they do not practise agriculture or cultivate plants of any kind, all their food is obtained through hunting and gathering. In their search for food, the Cuiva change location frequently; this is relatively easy for them: most travelling is done by canoe, they carry very few belongings, and it takes only a few minutes to leave one camping site and no more than half an hour to prepare the next. Over two years, people changed camping site on the average every 7.3 days.

All the members of any one band are assembled together, travelling and camping as a single group, for only one fourth of the year, mostly during the dry-season (December to April). During another fourth of the year - which is not closely bound to any season - each band divides into two separate and independent groups of roughly equal size (from 7o to 1o5 persons) which will often exploit very distant parts of the band's territory. During the other six months of the year, the Cuiva live in small groups of 1o to 4o individuals, which also separately and independently exploit various parts of the territory.

Practically all adults in Cuiva society are married and follow the rule of uxorilocal residence: upon marriage a man leaves his family group to go and live with his wife's parents. Most nuclear families are part of a larger unit, called "those who sleep under the same shelter", formed by husband and wife, their unmarried sons, their married daughters and the husbands of the latter. In turn, these groups hardly ever live isolated from the rest of society; they are always part of a larger unit formed by a few similar groups of "people who sleep under the same shelter". In any band there will be about 1o to 15 such units with an average size of about 2o individuals, usually closely related kin. And it is in small groups of this size that the Cuiva live, travel, and hunt, for about six months of every year.

In searching for food, the hunters rely most heavily on the canoe. Roughly 85% of the meat consumed is obtained from the immediate vicinity of the rivers. In contrast, the savannas, which are by far the largest ecological zone of the area, offer very little food and are only rarely visited by the Cuiva.

On the whole, the Cuiva eat very much and very well. I estimated in the field that their average daily consumption was about 525 grams of meat and 375 grams of vegetables and fruit. Moreover, the techniques used in obtaining all this food are remarkably simple, do not require any esoteric skill, can be practised by any adult, and never require the cooperative efforts of more than two hunters.

This "affluence" seems to be confirmed by the fact that on the average the adult men spend no more than 20 hours a week in food production, while they spend 16 hours out of 24 lying in their hammocks.

As in many other societies of hunters and gatherers, food is expected to be distributed among all those present at the camping site. Also, hunters freely share information about the food resources (for example, the news that fresh tracks have been seen on a river bank, or that fruit appears to be ripening) and are willing to share canoes, dogs, bows and arrows, or any other tool of production. Meanness about any personal belonging is perhaps the one sin of which no Cuiva wants to be accused.

History of the Cuiva

The territory occupied by the Cuiva lies at the crossroads of some of the main waterways leading to the interior of the South American continent. Thus, it is not surprising that Europeans have visited this territory regularly almost since the beginning of their conquest of South America. What seems more surprising is that more than four centuries after their "discovery" remarkably little is known about the indigenous populations of the Orinoco plains; and furthermore that some of these, especially the Cuiva, have until very recently resisted European influence within their own territory. This must be related to the incentives behind the various waves of European invasion and to the nature of the contacts between Europeans and the local populations.

Due to the lack of archaeological research in the eastern plains of Colombia and the absence of any previous ethnographic account of the Cuiva, our knowledge of their history is limited to reports from European explorers, travellers, and missionaries who have entered their territory. In general, these reports provide only scant, confused, and often unreliable information: the name "Cuiva" (also spelt "Cuiba", "Kuiba", "Kuiva", "Cuybas", "Cuibos" and "Quiva") is

frequently used to refer to populations which are geographically quite distant, or linguistically and culturally very different; or again, a variety of names (Cuiva, Mella, Ptamo, Chiricoa, Sikuani, etc.) is used when referring to the groups of nomadic hunters and gatherers living in the area around the Meta, Ariporo and Casanare rivers.

In the space available here, I can only summarize very briefly three distinct phases of Cuiva history, each phase being characterized by a particular type of European invasion.

1531 - 1650

In 1531, Diego de Ordaz travelled on the Orinoco without entering the Meta river. Between 1533 and 1535, Alonso de Herrera became the first European to travel on the Meta and thus to enter Cuiva territory; he was killed by the poisoned arrow of an Indian (Humboldt and Bonpland 1819: II, 690-2). Like later explorers, these men intruded into the area in search of gold, relentlessly pursuing the mythical El Dorado. Following the same impetus, a number of other expeditions crossed Cuiva territory between 1533 and the early part of the seventeenth century (Georg von Speier in 1535-36, Nicolas Federmann in 1536, Felipe de Huten in 1541 and Antonio de Berrio in 1590: all reported in Humboldt and Bonplans 1819: II, Chap. XXIV).

These explorers never colonized Cuiva territory. Their contacs with the Indian populations seem to have been limited to killing anyone who stood in their way (Ibid.II, 197). Slave trading has also been reported (Rivero 1883), and it seems likely that the explorers introduced diseases which may have had dramatic consequences for the indigenous populations. Unfortunately, the early reports contain very little information about the Cuiva and about the consequences of missionization.

1650 - 1767

Jesuit missionaries were responsible for the first European colonization of Cuiva territory. Entering the area by navigating the Casanare, they established mission posts on the upper parts of the Meta and Casanare rivers. These missionaries also left us the first ethnographic account of the indigenous populations of the area, where a clear distinction is made between settled horticultural populations and groups of nomadic hunters and gatherers. For the first time, the Cuiva are referred to as "nomadic Guahibo", a classification which is still maintained today.

Most of the proselytising seems to have been confined to the

riverine horticultural groups of Guahibo and Saliva, and the missionaries had only distant and often violent contacts with nomadic groups. Despite the apparent success of the missionaries among some groups of Guahibo, sources indicate that other groups in the area continued to harass all Europeans. As Fabo later reported, these Indians were "the stumbling-block of our old missionaries" (1911:41).

If the nomadic Guahibo remained hostile to the missionaries, it is also clear that the missionaries themselves conducted aggressive warfare against these Indians. Relying on the cheap labour force of the indigenous populations, the Jusuits created large herding estates, defended by small fortresses against the attacks of non-missionized Indians. Thus, "reducciones" were created, similar to those of Paraguay. By providing arms for the missionized Indians, the Jesuits controlled well-equipped armed-forces which lent great support to their proselytising; one Jesuit is quoted as saying that "the voice of the Gospel is only heard ..... where the Indians have also heard the voices of guns" (Humboldt and Bompland 1819:II, 274, my translation). Furthermore, warfare against the non-missionized Indians was not limited to defensive actions: "The soldiers, excited by the lure of financial rewards, made armed incursions inside the territories of the independent Indians. Anyone resisting was killed; houses were burned, plantations were destroyed, and the old, the women and the children were taken as prisoners." (Ibid.II, 274, my translation).

The expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767 was followed by an appreciable decrease in commerce in the area, when traders from Cartagena put pressure on the Government to limit free trade in the eastern plains. During subsequent years, there were hardly any Europeans within Cuiva territory: "Everywhere the savage Indians have taken advantage of this lack of population. They have drawn nearer to the large rivers, they harass the travellers, they are trying to reconquer what they have lost for centuries" (ibid.II, 287, my translation). - This remark is important: the Indians, in the absence of Europeans, returned "to the main rivers"; avoiding contact with invaders by finding refuge on the smaller rivers, away from the main waterways, is a tactical move which the Cuiva use even today.

This whole period of missionization seems to have been aptly summarized by Kirchhoff (1948:447): "Missionary work .... never met more than temporary success and was practically abandoned before the end of the century. This explains our lack of early references dealing

with these tribes"; and by Rivet (1948:197): "All these Indians .... led an essentially nomadic life. They always remained unwilling to accept civilization, and the efforts of missionaires to convert them remained practically fruitless" (my translation). According to Mozans (1910:147), who travelled in the area a century after the expulsion of the Jesuits, all traces of the missions had disappeared. What probably remained was the Cuiva's justified fear of and hostility towards all invaders.

1767 - 1960

The colonization of the eastern plains by Colombian cattle herders marks the third and final phase of Cuiva history. Settling at first on the upper parts of the Meta and Casanare rivers, the cattle herders progressively extended their domination over most of the plains. Towards the end of the 19th century, a few Colombian and Venezuelan families founded the small village of Cravo Norte, at the centre of Cuiva territory; this foundation probably marks the beginning of the period of more intense contacts between settlers and Cuiva. In the following years, a few ranches were established along the banks of the lower Casanare. At the same time, the settlers were occupying more and more land on the Meta river. These ranches, however, were few and very scattered; it is only since the Colombian civil war of the early fifties, and especially since 1960, that the economic opportunities of the area have been fully recognized by the rest of the country. This brought to the area a massive wave of new settlers who are now invading all parts of Cuiva territory.

The settlers have always preserved the attitudes of the missionaires towards the nomadic hunters and gatherers. Delgado (1909) gives a good summary of the relations between settlers and groups of nomadic Guahibo during the last century: on numerous occasions ranches are attacked, burned, and their occupants killed; but on the whole the settlers have a very great advantage in both the frequency and the cruelty of their attacks. Every dry season, expeditions of settlers are organized to track down and kill as many Indians as possible. In 1870, D. Pedro del Carmen Gutiérrez, the owner of a large ranch, invited some 250 Indians to a meal during which the settlers killed all but seven of the Indians (ibid. 203-5). History has repeated itself many times; as recently as December 1967, 16 Cuiva from one of the bands living in Venezuela were killed after accepting an invitation to share a meal with the occupants of the La Rubiela ranch, near the border between Colombia and Venezuela (El Espectador, Enero

29/1968). It is worth mentioning that during the trial which followed the 1967 massacre, the settlers frankly admitted their crime, as well as having killed about 40 Indians in other raids. They were acquitted because it was not deemed a crime for them to kill the Cuiva, whom they do not consider as human beings. During the first months of 1968 the Colombian Press reported the numerous ways in which the Cuiva and the Guahibo are today still being hunted and murdered by settlers (see for example El Tiempo Febrero 2/1968). Even today the settlers organize expeditions to exterminate the Indians, referring to these expeditions with the verb "cuiviar", a colloquial term formed from "cuiva" and the Spanish verb ending "-ar", giving the meaning "to hunt Cuiva".

The literature of the last two centuries, mostly reports from travellers and explorers, contains many references to the Cuiva. In fact, it seems customary for anyone writing about this part of Colombia to make at least a brief mention of the "real savages", the "ferocious" Cuiva. In most cases the author refers to the name Cuiva and tells us nothing about the people in question; in fact, with the possible exception of the Marquis de Wavrin, who met for a few hours a group of people he refers to as "Cuibos" (1939: 112-113, 162-164), none of these explorers has ever seen a Cuiva. The only interest of their reports is the way in which they reveal the opinions of settlers and other Indian tribes about the Cuiva: "Especially ferocious savages .... it is the Quivas" (Chaffanjon 1889: 177; my translation); "About the Cuivas nothing more is known than their name and that they are ferocious and intractable" (Triana 1913: 216; my translation); "These disgraceful members of the human species" (ibid. 224, my translation); "Miserable race", "Pitiful state of these Indians! What is the cause of such glaring social and intellectual degradation?" (Fabo 1911: 43, my translation); "The dangerous Cuibos, the most backward of all Indians" (Wavrin 1939: 145; my translation). Moreover, these opinions seem to be shared by some of the other Indian tribes living in the area. Morey (1969: 18) reports that for the agricultural Guahibo, southern neighbours of the Cuiva, the term "Sikuani" is synonymous with the Spanish designation Cuiba (Cuiva) and carries the derogatory connotation of "wild" or "savage". Also, the Yaruro, living on the Venezuelan side of the plains, describe the Cuiva as "very fierce" (Leeds 1964: 167).

Reflecting on the relations between the Cuiva and settlers, the reports of travellers stress repeatedly that the Cuiva shun all contact with the invaders and often react violently: "We sailed an entire week on the Meta without seeing or hearing a single human being. In some cases the Indians have for greater security, retired into the depths of the forest." (Mozans 1910: 147); "... they want to have nothing to do with the settlers and remain, to this day unamenable to all civilization ...." (Brisson 1896: 148; my translation); "..they never miss a favourable occasion to kill the whites whom they consider to be encroaching on their rights." (Vela 1936: 93, my translation).

The three bands of Cuiva with whom I lived probably constitute the last remaining groups of hunters and gatherers in the area. It seems likely that, over the last four centuries, many similar groups, especially those living near the largest rivers, have been exterminated either through warfare and slave trading or by the epidemic deseases brought in by Europeans. The Cuiva themselves state that entire bands have disappeared completely or have dissolved with their members joining other bands. It is also possible, though in no way certain, that some of the many Guahibo-speaking groups today living as settled horticulturalists were originally hunters and gatherers who were forced to abandon their hunting territories under pressure from the colonial invaders. I assume that the three groups which survived did so by avoiding contacts with the invaders, by retreating onto the smaller waterways within their territories, into areas less desirable and less accessible to explorers, missionaries, and modern settlers. However, the recent history of these three bands shows that their survival is now seriously threatened, as an ever increasing number of settlers often openly hostile to all Indians, are invading the area, depriving the Cuiva of most of their hunting territory.

Recent history

The Meta River band

This band, which has traditionally lived along the banks of the river Meta, is the one which has had the most contacts with Colombian society. During the past twenty years these Cuiva have seen their territory progressively invaded by settlers who, coming from the East, have established their ranches farther and farther down the

Meta River.

Gradually the Cuiva began to meet some of the settlers. They visited some of the ranches, at first begging for everything the settlers owned, then carrying out a few menial tasks, such as bringing water or firewood to the ranch, in the hope of being rewarded with clothes, sugar, salt, knives, or any other "non-Indian" goods. These visits were usually short, as the Cuiva would only come to a ranch when travelling in the area, in the course of a migration, and few would work for more than a day or two at a time.

To a large extent this is also true today: although the Cuiva occasionally work on ranches, they have not yet become a reliable, cheap labour force which the settlers could exploit. On the one hand, the settlers often have very little need for any kind of help on their ranches: once a house is built and a small garden planted, there is little more to do on a ranch than watch over the half-wild cattle grazing in the savanna; and when there is work to be done it often involves technical skills, such as repairing an outboard motor or treating sick animals, for which the Cuiva are totally unprepared. On the other hand, the Cuiva usually visit the settlers with the precise intention of obtaining a specific luxury, such as a new knife, a dress, or a shirt, and will leave the ranch at once after securing their goal.

Along the Meta River the relations between the Cuiva and the settlers seem to have varied from ranch to ranch. While some settlers were, by local standards, rather friendly and did not mind the Cuiva coming to work at their ranches, others remained hostile and tried to keep all Indians at a distance by shooting at them on sight. The presence of these hostile settlers had an immediate and far-reaching consequence: the Cuiva would not dare to come anywhere near the ranches of unfriendly settlers and thus effectively lost access to important parts of their hunting territory. Even in 1970 the Cuiva were afraid to travel through areas where they had been shot at almost ten years ago. As specific food resources are often located precisely in small areas within the larger territory, the loss of hunting grounds has meant that some animal and vegetable species are no longer available. The variety of edible food in the area has decreased rapidly, and the Cuiva have had to concentrate on the few species available in the areas where they remain free to travel.

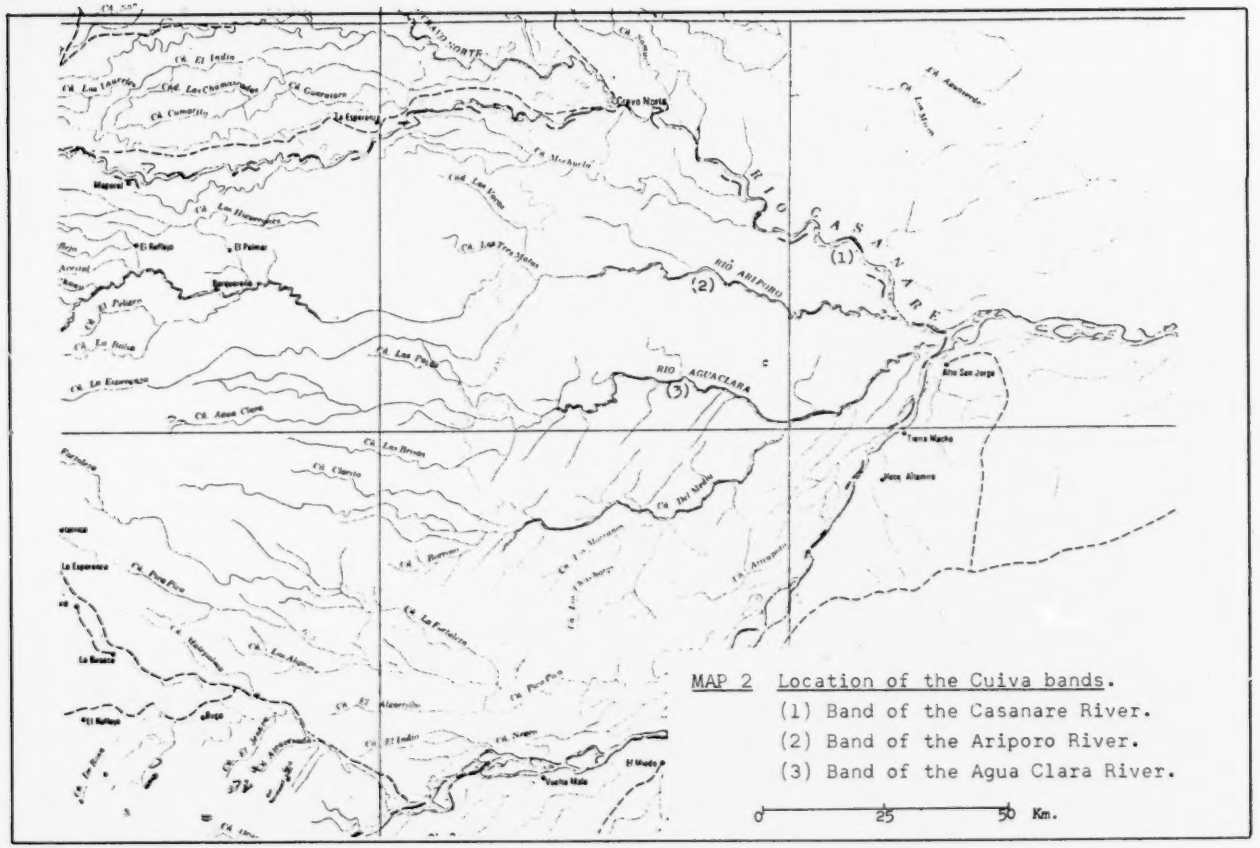
As the pressure on land was becoming severe along the Meta River, the band decided to build permanent houses and create a

village which would be used as a base camp for their migrations, and where they would cultivate the soil to supplement their hunting with manioc, corn, and bananas. The site chosen for this village was only minutes away from the ranch of a settler who had maintained friendly relations with the band and for whom quite a few Cuiva had worked in the past. The tools and seeds for cultivation were provided by newly-arrived American missionaries, who occasionally came from the neighbouring village of Cravo Norte to stay with the Cuiva for a few hours. The village experiment did not last long. As soon as a few houses were completed (others were in construction) and after the soil had been cleared and sown, Mario Gonzales, the neighbouring settler whom the Cuiva thought friendly, together with five of his friends, came to the Cuiva village at midday on the 2oth of July 1966. At the very moment when they were welcomed as friends, these settlers began shooting in all directions. Most of the Cuiva escaped into the forest, but one man (a cripple who could not run as fast as the others) was killed and six others were wounded. The settlers even took pains to cut up the body of the dead man and throw the parts into the river; some parts of the body remained hanging from branches overlooking the river.

On the insistence of the American missionaries living in Cravo Norte, the local police authorities pressed charges against these settlers, who were sent to trial in the capital of the "Departamento". Three months later, they were released and the case was dismissed for lack of evidence regarding an incident which had taken place in one of the remotest parts of the country, an area practically unknown to - and even less "controlled" by - the Colombian authorities.

I have gathered the account of this incident from the victims themselves, from the settlers, and from the missionaries. The settlers explained that they had acted in reprisal for the theft of some of their corn by the Cuiva. The Cuiva admitted having taken some corn, but as payment for work they had done on the ranch and for which they had never been remunerated.

In the days following the attack on their village, the Cuiva regrouped and moved North. They made camp on the banks of the Casanare River, next to the ranch of Georges Pellaton, a Swiss settler who has lived in Colombia for the last thirty years, a man with remarkable sympathy for the Indians. On this new site the Cuiva again started building a village and cultivating the soil. And this is where I met this band from 1968 to 197o.


RIO CASANARE
(1)
(2)
RIO ARIPORO
(3)
RIO AGUACLARA
Cravo Norte
Arauca
Tame
Arauquita
Saravena
Fortul
Tame
Tame Viejo
Alto San Jorge
Tame Alcaraván
Puerto Rondón
Puerto Lleras
Puerto Jordán
Puerto Rico
Puerto Gaitán
Puerto López
Puerto Porfía
Puerto Nariño
Puerto Carreño
Puerto Inírida
Puerto Ayacucho
Puerto Páez
Puerto Ordaz
Puerto Cabello
Puerto La Cruz
Puerto Cumarebo
Puerto Cabello
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Puerto Cabello

As their gardens offer very little food, the band still rely on hunting and gathering for their subsistence. The village is no more than a base camp occupied only about one fourth of the year. But they are rapidly losing all of their hunting territory to the settlers, and there are many signs that the game in the area is rapidly disappearing. Most of the game is also hunted by the settlers, who are well equipped with guns, and even by hide poachers coming to Cuiva territory, often from distant parts of Colombia, for the sole purpose of hunting caimans and crocodiles. The net result for the Cuiva is that while their gardens do not yet provide a sufficient diet, the productivity of hunting is rapidly declining, and, at least during the past five years, the band has suffered seriously from malnutrition. At the same time, as these Cuiva come more and more into contact with settlers, they are contracting various epidemic diseases which now threaten their physical survival.

The relations between this band and the settlers who surround the village are at times fairly tense. During my stay there were three isolated cases of Cuiva being shot at by passing settlers (with no serious injury). Nevertheless, as many Cuiva become individually known in the area, as they become personal acquaintances of many settlers, it seems that the whole climate of inter-ethnic relations is slowly being transformed. For the first time, the Cuiva are distinguished individually and given Spanish names. One could think that this personalization makes it more difficult for settlers to kill "Indians" indiscriminately. But let us not forget that the settlers responsible for the attack on the Cuiva camp in 1966 were those who knew the Indians best.

No one can be certain what will happen to this band in the next few years. The number of settlers in the area is rapidly increasing and will probably continue to do so. It seems obvious that the band's traditional hunting territory will soon be totally parcelled out amongst Colombians and that hunting for the Cuiva will be reduced to the level of a pastime, no longer offering a sufficient diet. It is also possible that with help from the missionaries, epidemic diseases will be controlled and agriculture will be organized on a somewhat more productive basis. In this case, the band would gradually form a village community more and more similar to the settlers' ranches, especially in its economic base; for sooner or later the Cuiva, to survive, would need to own and raise cattle which they could then sell to obtain the "western" goods which they now require. How Cuiva society as a whole would be transformed by such a change from hunting

and gathering to cattle herding is more difficult to assess: but there seems to be little reason why the Cuiva could not carry on producing food individually while distributing all profits through their system of generalized exchange.

For this solution to be realistic, however, the Cuiva would need sufficient land to raise enough cattle for more than 500 people. At present they control nowhere near this amount. The site on which the band has built its village is no larger than 10 hectares, not even enough to supply them with vegetables. The land all around this site is now occupied, and legally owned, by settlers.

Another possible course of development would be for this band to come and settle close to the small Colombian town of Cravo Norte. By establishing their village on the banks of the river Casanare, the Cuiva have settled only a day's journey from Cravo Norte, and this small town represents a very real attraction to many people. Cravo Norte is the highlight of the settlers' world: this is where all the shops are, where there is electricity, where there are cars, and the airplanes leading to the outside world. Since 1967, the band has visited Cravo Norte more and more frequently; in 1970, some Cuiva spent as much as three months in the year living close to the town. There they carry out menial tasks for which they are usually given sugar, alcohol, clothes, or the leftovers from a slaughtered cow. When given money, the Cuiva spend it immediately in the shops for food or clothes; the shopkeepers accept nothing but money and fortunately have never created debt relationships with the Indians. When in Cravo Norte the Cuiva eat much sweets and very little meat; the quantitative difference between the food consumed when away from the settlers and when in Cravo Norte is enormous, and the qualitative difference (which I never calculated with any precision) is probably just as great.

Within the next few years the whole band may well decide to settle close to Cravo Norte and serve as the town's cheap labour force. This would repeat what happened in the town of Arauca, where Guahibo-speaking Indians live a short distance away from the town, providing it with water, firewood, and whatever unskilled work (including prostitution) is required by the settlers. Without any formal education and without expertise in the settlers' way of life - not even knowing Spanish - the Cuiva could only be integrated into the lowest level of the Colombian lower class.

Ariporo River Band

This band has had far less contact with Colombian society. The part of the river Ariporo where the Cuiva live has been colonized by settlers only since 1968. However, during my stay I witnessed the invasion of the territory of this band by a dozen independent settlers and the rapid transformation of their material culture by the introduction of cooking pots, knives, clothes, etc. These Cuiva were coming more and more into contact with settlers, and by mid-197o many of them were preparing to build a village and begin cultivating the soil. In many ways, their situation in 197o was similar to that of the Meta River Band in 1967.

On the Ariporo, the relations between Indians and settlers are on the whole uneasy and tense. On the one hand, the Cuiva occasionally visit and work for the settlers, but they also steal their farm produce, their pigs, and even some of their cows. On the other hand, most settlers want to have nothing to do with the Indians and will even shoot at them on sight. On one occasion, as I was accompanying a group of Cuiva walking on the shore of the Ariporo, shots were fired at us from a passing boat. Another time, we were shot at by a lone rider while walking through the savanna. The Cuiva say that such incidents are frequent.

As more and more settlers are invading the territory of this band, and as relations between settlers and Indians show no sign of improvements, it is quite possible that some settlers will soon organize a direct attack on a Cuiva camp, comparable to the one against the Meta River band in 1967. The Indians would then be forced to abandon practically all of their hunting grounds.

The Aqua Clara River Band

At the time of my departure from Colombia, this band had had only very little contact with settlers, and the description of Cuiva life given in the Introduction is applicable today only to this band. Settlers are few on the Agua Clara River, and most of them have their ranches far from Cuiva territory. Nevertheless, the Indians are certainly aware of the settlers' presence and describe their relations with them as a state of open war. They avoid all contacts with the settlers, claim to have a tremendous fear of them, and would probably not hesitate in attacking any isolated, poorly defended ranch; members of the other two bands would claim to be less afraid of the

settlers, but would no longer dare to attack a ranch. With the increase in the number of settlers invading its territory, this band is consistently moving farther and farther away from the main rivers into the uninhabited lands of the interior. But this strategy has an obvious limit, and at the time I left Colombia the band had reached an area from where there is no escape route while dozens of settlers were preparing to colonize the Agua Clara.

Moreover, the Agua Clara River band has only 141 members, a number hardly sufficient to make it a viable society. In order to survive, this band would have to maintain contacts with other bands, even if only to ensure that most of its adult members will be able to find a spouse. But the communication routes between the different bands are now occupied by hostile settlers, and the Agua Clara River band has lived in almost total isolation from the other bands for the last five years. As a further misfortune, on one of the very few occasions when members of the band visited another band, they were exposed to measles. The subsequent epidemic, lasting more than two months, reached catastrophic proportions: of the 48 people who originally set out to visit the neighbouring band, only 12 survived to return to their own band. Since all Cuiva bands are equally vulnerable to epidemic diseases, it is very possible that, with the rapid increase of the number of settlers in the area, the Cuiva will not physically survive the next decade.

The attitudes of the settlers

Most settlers in the area are recent immigrants from the central regions of Colombia. Pressed to leave their native land by the population explosion, the scarcity of farming land, or the civil war, these people come to Cuiva territory with hopes of getting rich quick. According to the various vague and even contradictory laws regulating land ownership in this area, it is sufficient for a settler to build a fence around the part of the savanna required for his cattle and to exploit this land for a few years, to acquire a legal title to it. Another legal provision is that the land claimed by a settler must not already be occupied by indigenous people; but this has never detracted settlers from claiming land, and has often served as an incentive for eliminating the Indians. Also, the land claimed by each settler is often far in excess of the legal limit (3000 hectares) set by the Government, and the authorities have always been unable to control the application of their own laws.

In total contrast to the Cuiva, the settlers are mostly interested in the grazing grounds offered by the savannas. For them, the rivers are little more than means of transportation, and the forests provide them only with very secondary agricultural products. Also very different from the attitudes of the Cuiva are the settlers' attitudes to land and food resources, which are always considered as strictly private property, and over which settlers occasionally fight among themselves.

Many settlers coming to the area bring their own cattle and set up their own ranches. However, the majority of Colombians now living inside Cuiva territory are not settlers properly speaking, but propertyless ranch hands. Each ranch owner has four or five employees, usually young unmarried men, who will work with him for a few years before moving on to another ranch; these men constitute a migrating labour force throughout the Llanos. Some of these workers will succeed in accumulating enough capital to buy cattle of their own and become settlers, while others spend their wages quickly in the nearest bar or brothel.

Most Colombians in this area have either had a few years of formal schooling or have been educated in the popular traditions. In either case, they have learnt from Colombian history that the indigenous populations of Colombia are primitive people whom the Spanish conquerors tried to convert and civilize. This basic assumption leads to two predominant attitudes towards the Indians. Some settlers are openly hostile to the Indians, desiring their extermination as one desires the disappearance of snakes, mosquitoes, crocodiles, tropical diseases, and all that makes life difficult in this part of the world. These settlers state openly their conviction that Indians are more animal than human, and this is the mentality behind the Indian hunts and massacres. The other attitude is one of compassion and love for the Indians, who are seen as deprived and unfortunate members of the human species. From this point of view, it is urgent to help the Indians by providing them with land, medical care, schooling, religion, and a vast supply of western material goods. This attitude led some of the people in Cravo Norte to organize an "Indian Day", where they donated a boat-load of presents (food, clothes, and cooking utensils) to a Cuiva band.

These two attitudes are not new; they have been debated throughout the history of western philosophy (Zavala 1964). Nevertheless, these remain, on the whole, the points of view most commonly held by the settlers today.

An interesting aspect of the attitudes of the settlers towards the Indians is how their descriptions of the various Cuiva bands have changed in recent years. I was told that about ten years ago, at a time when the Meta River band had had little contact with settlers, these Cuiva were considered dangerous", "untrustworthy", and "very fierce". When I first came to the area, no settler ever described in these terms the Cuiva of the Meta River, but it was then the Ariporo River band, of whom much less was known, whom they labelled as "fierce" and "dangerous". After two years, as the Ariporo band came into more and more contact with settlers, and as the existence of a third band, that of the Agua Clara River, was discovered, the members of this third band were said to be the only real "wild savages" left in the area. The other Cuiva, no longer "wild and fierce", are now seen as "weird", "ignorant", "funny", "poor", "lazy", "naive", "childish", and a number of other adjectives which reflect the settlers' feeling of superiority and total control over the Indians. To a great extent, this change seems to have been brought about by the rapid increase of the number of settlers in the area, which has reinforced their sense of security while destroying that of the Cuiva.

Another point of view worth mentioning, although very exceptional, was that of one particular settler who clearly understood that the economic welfare of the Cuiva is based on the exploitation of the rivers, while the settlers are almost exclusively oriented towards the exploitation of the savannas. This man saw no reason why the two groups could not live peacefully, separately but side by side; but he also reached the conclusion that the absence of economic competition is not sufficient to erase the possibility of conflicts based on racial prejudices.

The work of missionaries

Missionaries are the only persons in the area professionally involved in taking a direct interest in the situation of the Indians. There are four missionaries, divided into two teams, working among the Cuiva. All come from the mid-western United States and Canada, and all have come in order to fulfil their religious vocations. One of these teams is a couple from an American evangelical mission. They reside in the small town of Cravo Norte, where they work among both the Cuiva and the local Colombian population. The other team, composed of two women, works for the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

Both teams established contact with the Cuiva about seven years ago, and both are struggling to learn the Cuiva language which they see as the first essential step in their missionary effort.

On numerous occasions since their arrival, the missionaries have helped the Cuiva by providing them with medicine; the importance of this help cannot be overemphasized. Although it is impossible to give any precise estimate, it seems likely that the medical help provided by these missionaries has already saved many lives. However, the missionaries visit the Cuiva for only very short periods at a time: since 1965 no missionary has spent more than 2 months in the year living with the Cuiva; and they have contacts with only one band of Cuiva, that of the Meta River.

The missionaries are also helping the Cuiva to increase the productivity of their gardens, which could do much to attenuate the problem of food shortages, irrespective of the missionaries' interest in seeing the Cuiva settle in permanent villages. The missionaries have also tried, whenever they could, to protect the Indians from the attacks and exploitation of the settlers; here their main success has been in changing the attitudes of those settlers who have adopted their own evangelical faith. Finally, the missionaries have made some efforts, but without success, to exert pressure on the Colombian Government to recognize officially the rights of the Cuiva to their own land, and on the local police authorities to supervise the behaviour of the settlers towards the Indians. Their greatest success has been to bring about, under pressure from Bogota, an official public declaration by the mayor of Cravo Norte, stating that a large section of the land in the area legally belongs to the Cuiva and thus cannot be occupied by anyone else. The mayor's statement has had no effect whatever, and nothing has been done to enforce this declaration.

In summary, the missionaries up to now have behaved less as missionaries of the Christian faith than simply as links between the Cuiva and Colombian society; and as such they have shown a very genuine concern for the welfare of the Indians. At the same time, they have become the main source of western material goods for the Cuiva. They buy Cuiva "handicrafts", such as bows, arrows and hammocks with clothes, pots, knives, flashlights, etc. (on one occasion at least, the representatives of the Summer Institute of Linguistics sold perfume to the Cuiva). The missionaries' immediate plans are

to translate the Bible into the Cuiva language and to teach the Cuiva to read it.

The Cuiva Point of View

The opinion of the Cuiva as to what is happening to their own world should be the one that matters most. This point of view is complex and sometimes paradoxical.

Amongst the Cuiva who have had the most contact with settlers. the "old days" when there were very few settlers around are remembered as a time when land and food were abundant, but also as a time when people were deprived of clothes, pots, knives, etc. Logically enough, the present day is also seen as a time of abundance (of western material goods) and of scarcity (of land, food, and people).

The massive introduction of western goods into one of the three bands has given rise to a new expression of the traditional inter-band rivalry. The Meta River band now speak of the other bands as "poor", "deprived", "primitive". Members of the other bands speak of them as"degenerate", "slaves of settlers", etc.

The Cuiva are probably unanimous in wishing to acquire all the western goods they can, and this often plays an important part in their liking of missionaries, friendly settlers, anthropologists, or anyone else who is a generous giver. In turn, each new visitor introduces new needs and thus creates a never ending cycle.

According to the classification by the Cuiva of their social environment, no "non-Indians" (a term defined by social and cultural characteristics and not on a physical or racial basis) are part of the same humanity as "Indians". In fact, the "non-Indians" are created at the death of "Indians", when their souls go away to a distant land where they become settlers. As the number of settlers increases, more Cuiva die, thus creating more settlers.

"Non-Indian" society is described as being in many ways the axact opposite of "Indian" society. All the rules of proper behaviour in Cuiva society are broken, or inverted, in the world of the settlers; to give only one example, settlers are said to marry their classificatory sister, while Cuiva should always marry classificatory cross-cousins. The "non-Indian" personality is seen as hard, tough, selfish and mean. This is stated explicitly in the following part of the myth which is given as an explanation of the origin of the "non-Indians":

The man came to his shelter and placed his son in his hammock.

The next day, the son said to his father, "Build a fence and bring the timber to build my house."

"All right", said the father.

The man built a long fence and a house. After many days of work, his son told him again, "Father, do the cooking. And after that go and kill the Indians who steal my cattle."

The father went and killed the robbers. The next day, the son jumped on his horse and went to check his cattle in the savanna. He had horses, cows, guns, cooking pots, machetes, mosquito nets, cloth hammocks, trousers, etc. When he returned from the savanna, he scolded his father: "You never do anything. All you want to do is eat my nice, fat cows."

The father was shy and did not dare look his son in the eye. Then the son took his gun and killed his father.

The following day, the father came back to life again and began to laugh. "My son", he said, "you have become a "non-Indian".

The son went away taking all his belongings. And this is how "non-Indians" were created.

What can be done

The Cuiva see as their most pressing problem at this time the protection of their right to their own land. They state openly that they have been robbed of what is rightfully theirs, and that they are very anxious over the loss of many of their food-producing areas. They are very much aware of being driven into starvation, and that their survival is not at all secure. They are also convinced that these problems would be solved if they were given an sufficiently large territory, within which no settler would be allowed to intrude. On the other hand, only the Cuiva who have had little or no contact with Colombian society would favour living in total isolation from the settlers. The other Cuiva have now adopted some western material goods; a constant supply of these goods, as well as medical help, appears to be a necessity.

To fulfil these wishes, and thus give the Cuiva some form of control over what is happening to their world, would require a partial change of the settlers' society, of the Colombian Government's attitude towards indigenous populations, and perhaps even a change in the attitude of the western world towards what it calls "under-developed" countries like Colombia. One could demonstrate a long chain of responsibitily for the present situation of the Cuiva, but I prefer, in

this context, to focus only on the more practical elements of a solution.

The Colombian Government should be convinced of the urgent need to protect Cuiva territory by making sure that no new settler is allowed to establish his ranch there and by displacing some of those already established. To a certain extent, a law to that effect already exists - the law protecting territories occupied by indigenous people - and what is needed is a mechanism of local enforcement. Such a project would run into two major obstacles. First, the fact that the Colombian Government has many other priorities: some could easily argue that the cost of ensuring the survival of about 540 Cuiva could be better used to relieve some of the misery of the thousands of Colombian ghetto dwellers. Secondly, such a project would represent an important change in the Government's attitude towards indigenous populations, an attitude which often assumes that these populations represent an element of "backwardness" and "primitiveness", which a country concerned with modern development should be eager to eradicate through education and evangelization.

Since the Colombian economy is to a great extent dependent on foreign economic help, it would seem that foreign governments are in a position to exert some pressure on the Colombian authorities to protect the rights of the indigenous populations. Such efforts could be expected from Western European governments which have recently been made aware of the problem. However, one soon finds that such governments are terribly worried about possible accusations of "neo-colonialism", and, in any case, have done little more than pay lip-service to a humanitarian interest in the fate of the South American Indians.

Taking for granted that both the attitude of the Colombian Government and the economic structure of the Western World are unlikely to change within the next few years - decisive years for the Cuiva - any realistic solution must be practicable within the context of the present situation. For this reason, I would suggest that while carrying on the struggle for the recognition of their rights, we should provide the Cuiva with the means to buy their own land.

Such land could be bought, simply because most of the settlers came to the area to make a quick fortune, and are in fact seeking buyers for a piece of land which they colonized but never bought from anyone. In buying their own land, the Cuiva would acquire the legal rights to their territory in terms of the economic system by which

the settlers themselves operate; this would show better results than trying to convince the settlers of the abstract "rights of the indigenous populations". Also, the size of the transaction would no doubt create a new respect if not for the Cuiva themselves, at least for their rich and powerful friends, and this would be a strong incentive for the settlers not to intrude on Cuiva property. The settlers are accustomed to think that economic power always works hand-in-hand with political power and judicial authority.

I would estimate that about US $ 25,000 would be sufficient to buy back for the Cuiva a large part of their traditional territory - the land, but not the cattle roaming on it. There is still some hope that governments may provide some of this money, but a more realistic solution would be to organize a public subscription. This money can probably be raised, but one cannot help feeling rather cynical when one realizes that a similar amount would be readily available if the project was to transform the whole area into a park for the protection of rare animal species.

The first step in concretizing this project will be to seek professional legal advice, probably in Colombia, on how the purchase of this land can best be arranged (perhaps by setting up a board of trustees). I hope to be able to report on this in the very near future.

Once the sole owners of a sufficiently large territory, the Cuiva would have little difficulty in adapting to the society around them. Sooner or later they would require further financial help to provide them with cattle. This would immediately change their economic relations with settlers and missionaries, as the Cuiva would no longer need to work for others or sell "handicrafts" to obtain the western goods which they require. The Cuiva could then deal with Colombian society on its own terms, and thus be protected from it.

For a few years to come the Cuiva will be in need of help. First of all, the help of the Colombian Government and of the existing Colombian associations for the defense of Indian rights (such as the Comite de Defensa del Indio) which would most likely support the project and make sure that it is carried through and that Indian land is respected. The medical help and the economic expertise which the Cuiva need could be provided by a permanent representative, either of the Government or of the Colombian humanitarian associations, residing in the area. The cost of maintaining this permanent

representative would be relatively small and this role could soon be taken over by the Cuiva themselves. Another possibility (suggested to me by Dr. James Woodburn of the London School of Economics) would be to ask anthropologists professionally interested in the area to put themselves at the service of the Cuiva and act as mediators between the two societies; this possibility is becoming more and more feasible, since the academic year which keeps most anthropologists busy is being shortened, and travels "to the field" are easier than ever. I am convinced that there are enough people in Colombia and abroad who are genuinely concerned with what is happening to groups like the Cuiva, to make this project realistic and feasible. For the time being, I would suggest that we proceed rationally and concentrate all our efforts on securing for the Cuiva the legal rights to their own land.

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